

A COZY MYSTERY MICRO-NOVEL

MURDER ON B flat

IT WAS A PERFECT
NIGHT UNTIL
THE LIGHTS WENT

BLACK

A
MARK GALBRAITH MYSTERY

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SOLUTIONS

A COZY MYSTERY MICRO NOVEL SERIES

MURDER IN B FLAT

A

MARK GALBRAITH MYSTERY

CHAPTER ONE

It was turning out to be perfect. The Raptured Blues Band had hoped that their come back tour would ignite a new and bold future in the new and bold world of internet tweeks and twitters, shares and ipods. The world, the whole world was at their finger tips. It was expanding with every concert. Old fans were welcoming them back, new fans were growing and it looked like their come back would go far beyond the heights of old. Already the single downloads for their songs were sky-rocketing.

Their next tour-stop was a Blues Festival just north of Wiareton. They were headlining the new venue that was boasting ticket sales in the tens of thousands. Fans were coming from all over the country, travelling north from the US west from Europe.

The Raptured Blues Band was gathered in tent behind the stage. The energy was escalating almost out of control but Phil Weiland the Bass Player, always the calm and collected one managed to keep that energy from exploding before it was needed on stage.

“Hold on to it people. This is going to be our best concert yet and we all need to be right on top and in sync.” Phil urged softly and for a moment the other members of the band turned to him and let his calmness feed into them.

“That’s it guys. Breath. In tenout ten.....in ten.....out ten....”

“We are taking the world by storm.” Syd Little said excitedly in her low grinding blues voice.

CHAPTER TWO

Mark Galbraith clicked his drum-sticks together and they all began to chant a line from their newest single . “We won’t stop til we reach the top!”

Sam Lodharm stuck his head through the tent door. “Ok kids. Their ready for you. The M.C. is introducing you. Mark...you out first and get a good steady beat going, then you Phil and pound out a bass rift then the rest of you, Syd last and get’em clapping. You guys know the routine. Get them gyrating fast and you’ll have them hooked.” The band’s manager, promoter and booking agent instructed. “Get out there and kill it.” He added then stepped aside holding the tent door open.

Thirty thousand pairs of eyes and ears were fixed on the stage as The Rapture Blues Band came out. The applause was deafening and the screams shrieked through the night. The staged lights flashed, blinked and scanned the stage and audience. Nothing in

the entire world of excitement could have been more electrifying.

Mark climbed on to his drum kit and started a powerful three quarter time beat that reverberated over the massive speaker system.

The crowd was going insane, millions of people were watching the band in a live video explode into super-stars and the road ahead was being paved in platinum as their album sold and the clicks escalated.

10,000,000 witnesses watched the resurrection of one of the world's greatest blues bands.

The music cried and wailed like a thousand tortured demons.

When Syd little, the bands lead singer came on stage there was pandemonium. And when her voice raged through the speakers it blended in perfect harmony with the music turning tortured demons to soaring angels.

And so the concert of a life time began.....

Then the lights went black and there was instant chaos!

CHAPTER THREE

For a moment there was silence. One could have heard a feather floating to the ground and a pin drop would have resounded like a hammered bass drum. Then a single voice ripped the quiet in a

scream destined to be remembered for its horrific scraping of the soul of anyone who heard it.

“What the hell.” Mark groaned in a voice like a spinning grinder on steel. “Get the damn lights back on!” He demanded. His words barely cleared his lips when they did pop back on in blinding suddenness. And again a silence filled the air as everyone’s eyes trained on the body of Syd Little, sprawled on the stage lying twisted in a pool of thick redness.

Then came the chaos of screams and wails.

In an instant Mark Galbraith was off his drum kit and drawing in on Syd’s body, calling out her name even though he knew she would not answer, she would never talk.....or sing again. It did not take a coroner to pronounce her dead at the scene.

Someone yelled, “Call for an ambulance.” Mark added. “Call the police. She’s gone. She’s been.....murdered.” He announced staring now at the knife lying next to her body that without doubt had pierced her straight through the heart.

He had no more than issued the order to call the police when a middle aged man came on the stage displaying a badge. He was talking on a cell phone and motioning with his badge hand for Mark to step back and stay clear of the murder scene. When he flipped his phone closed he directed everyone else to stay exactly where they stood.

Jeanette Galbraith came on stage just then to see what all the commotion was about. Her eyes fixate on the body of her friend Syd. Immediately she swooned and fainted...A minute later she woke up and said, "I need a glass of wine. Then she gazed meaningfully at her husband and said, "You just got back from the Finland tour, now this. What next Secret Black Ops agent ?"

Mark grinned and replied.. "Nah..Just truck drivin around the north pole", adding "I hope you can put this behind you hon. You need to get home regroup and be ready to help like you always have." Mark replied, smiling warmly.

CHAPTER FOUR

Twenty minutes later the stage was swarming with police techs from the major crime scene unit. The coroner had arrived and two detectives followed with in another five minutes, The latter, with the help of three uniformed officers and the first officer on the scene were taking statements from everyone who was on the stage.

Mark Galbraith returned to his drum kit. For several minute he sat there staring contemplatively into space and twirling drum sticks in his fingers. He was recreating the minutes before the stage went black, digging deep into his memory while it was still fresh. When it was his turn to give a statement he wanted to offer up every detail he could conjure.

Mixed in with the memories was something about Syd's body laying there, lifeless but still warm. "No not her body." Zinged through his thoughts....then..."That's it. I know that knife...."

Mark could not bring himself to believe what the image in his mind was telling him. The knife lying next to Syd was too familiar not to recognize. With a sense of distain he went in search of the bands Roadie Boss, that everyone called Echo. The knife, flip knife he used for cutting tape, string, slicing open boxes and now a knife that was used to kill Syd.

Mark found Echo searching through his tool box muttering. "It can't be. I left it here."

"Echo. Do you know where your knife is?" Mark queried without accusation."

"I wish I didn't, but hatefully I think I do and it's making me sick and frightened. The cops are going to pin this on me. But it wasn't me. I left my blade in the tool box, but it's gone." Echo's voice quavered.

"Don't worry. We will go and talk to that police inspector before he figures out who the knife belongs to."

"That might not be a good idea Mark." Echo replied nervously.

"Why?" Mark asked but the answer never came because just then the rest of the band came to join them. They had all realised who the knife belonged to and were as stymied as Mark...and Echo.

Phil Weiland the bass player stared hard at Echo. It had been Phil who got his friend the lead hand job. “Tell me you didn’t do this Echo. I went all out for you.” He demanded.

“Phil....I swear...I would never hurt Syd.....You know how I felt about her.” Echo replied anxiously.

“Yah. She told me.” The lead guitarist, Dave Little, Syd’s cousin, cut in sharply. “But she didn’t want to be like that with you. Just friends.”

“I know. I always knew that and lived with it.” Echo replied.

Mike Woods, rhythm guitarist stepped up. “I don’t think you did this. I saw you just before the lights went out. I looked over and saw you put your knife in the tool box then leave. When I saw you again a minute later you were headed for the sound booth.”

“I saw Sam near the tool box just before the lights went out. He took something but I missed what it was.” Deb Clark put in.

Just then Sam joined them. “You guys are back on. Deb....here’s your chance. You are taking Syd’s place.”

“Now!” Mark shot back. “How can we....?”

“Look. If you don’t get back up there now we lose the whole damn tour. I have big bucks invested in this band and I won’t let you back out.....Now get up there and play....” Sam Lodharm ordered.

“Come on. Let’s do it, but when we are done you and I are going to have a talk Sam.” Mark demanded in a low threatening voice.

CHAPTER FIVE

Syd’s body was gone but the dark stain of blood was still there. The show went on. Thousands of fans new and past crowded the landscape. Eighty minutes of music, fifty from old albums and thirty minutes grinding out the new album, Blues in B Flat a unique recording with five tracks each six minutes long telling an incredible story. The band was into the second track when a long stored memory returned to Mark’s conscious thought. The memory followed a path straight to Syd’s death but proving it would be difficult. By the end of the last song Mark Galbraith was torn. So much of the past made more sense to him than it ever had before. So much of the ‘Why’ behind the band’s break up was showing through and Blues In B Flat held all the clues. But one of the two people who could have put the puzzle all together was laying in the morgue and the other was not likely to open up.

The crowd went berserk. Even as the band left the stage then came back for an encore the downloads for Blues In B Flat were soaring and Mark, despite his admiration for Syd realized their backup singer had more heart for the lead vocals than Syd. Not that, that was always true. Back in the day no one could cut it better than Syd, but something had turned in her and her performances, though still electric had slipped, especially when they played tunes from the new album.

Mark set his sticks aside and placed his hands on his knees, lowered his head and used the applause of the crowd as a backdrop for his thoughts. He let them drift back two years when the band broke up, just after finishing recording Blues In B Flat. Syd and her partner Ray Slinger had written the lyrics at a time when their relationship was faltering. Soon after the band split Ray had disappeared.

The festival M.C. ran on to the stage and kept the crowd raving as he introduced an up and coming Rock Band. It was a tough job changing the mindset of the crowd when they were still chanting Raptured Blues Band....Raptured Blues Band.....

As the band descend from the stage the cops were there waiting. It had not taken them long to figure out who owned the knife and that the owner had a pretty heavy arrest sheet. They had come for Echo, but Echo was nowhere to be found.

“I guess that tells its own truth.” Inspector Bosend announced. “Put an APB out on Peter Ballharns.”

“Inspector. Echo didn’t do this.” Mark Galbraith spoke in the roadie’s defense.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders. “It looks like it to me. Unless something else comes up to point me in another direction I’ll spend my time building evidence against Ballharns. More evidence since I already have a good case against him now.”

At that the inspector turned and walked away but as he went, “I’ll be come round to interview each of you again and I hope I don’t find any of you harbouring.....”

The blasting music of the Rock Band obliterated the end of the inspector’s sentence.

CHAPTER SIX

Echo watched and listened as the police inspector announced he was looking for Peter Ballharns, his own name but one he seldom shared with anyone. That name was connected to things in his past he wanted to forget. But now his past had caught up with him and even though he had nothing to do with Syd Little’s death there was a history between them...one that had caused Echo a million sleeps full of horrifying nightmares, a history that might land him in prison forever if anyone made the connections.

As soon as the cops were gone Echo went to talk to Mark. It was his only way out of this mess. He knew Mark, better than the drummer realized.

“Echo. What the hell are you doing?” Mark Galbraith demanded ferociously.

“I can’t let them take me in Mark. There are things that I know about Syd that would change everything for a lot of people....including you. If the cops find out what I know there will be big trouble. If the cops find out what happened to Ray Slanger a couple of years ago all hell will break loose.”

“You know what happened to Ray.” Mark replied accusingly.

“I do. And so did Syd.”

“You had better tell me all about it if you want me to help you out of this mess.” Mark instructed.

“First things first. Ray deserved everything he got. He was a creep, the kind that even creeps hate and fear. He was going to kill Syd back then.....and now he has....in a way.”

“To cryptic Echo. Let’s get out of here and go somewhere where you can give me the whole story.”

“Not now. I have something I have to take care of first. Meet me here after the stage closes down for the night and everyone is gone.”

“Alright Echo. We have the last show. It ends at eleven. This area should be clear by mid-night. Don’t let me down. If you do I’ll turn you in myself.”

“I’ll be here Mark. I swear and so will Ray.”

“You know where he is?”

“Yup. So did Syd and so does Phil.” It’s a friggin mess.”

“I suppose now you are going to tell me you know who killed Syd.” Mark groaned.

“No I don’t, that’s why I need your help, me and Phil...the three of us...we...damn...I gotta go...I will tell you everything tonight.”

Echo quickly turned and ran off, disappearing into the crowd like a wraith. Mark just stood there as Echo’s words and the lyrics of, Blues In B Flat resounded in his mind....especially the last song....He’ll Never Do That Again.

“What’s up Drummer Man.” Phil’s voice was soft as always but it broke into Marks thoughts like a bad hit on his snare.”

“You are up. You know a lot about this mess. You, Syd and Echo. Now you are going to tell me what the hell is going on.”

Phil grimaced and shrugged his shoulders. “It was Ray’s own damn fault and Echo had nothing to do with it except being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“Sure. Now get on with it before I.....” Mark didn’t finish the threat...he just stood there glaring at the bass player.

“You gotta remember. At the time Ray was losing it. He was strung out and losing his grip on reality. He thought Syd was trashing him because she wanted all the credit for the new album....Mark....He went at her like a mad man. Syd was just defending herself.”

“Echo said he is still alive.” Mark interrupted.

“He is...more or less.”

“But this is all just history. What does it have to do with Syd’s murder?” Mark queried ponderously.

“I talked to Echo a few minutes ago. I know he is coming here tonight after the concert. I don’t know who killed Syd and I don’t think Echo does either but we might be able to figure it out.” Phil replied.

“We better or Echo’s going down for it.” Mark replied.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Echo drove away in the borrowed car...well it was not exactly borrowed....he took it. He knew the owner but there was no time to wait around and ask so he took the car and left a note hoping that would be enough. Taking the car was necessary. He had to get to B-Town and pick up Ray and get back to the festival before mid-night. Even with a car it was going to be a tight squeeze to get back in time. He also had to steal Ray which was not going to be easy. The nursing home wouldn’t give him up freely, not without proper authorization and for that there was just no time.

Ray Slinger stared out the window that looked over the Nursing home court yard. His view of it was much like a child of six....or seven. He had vague memories of the past....mostly nightmares. Sleeping and waking but nothing he could ever quite hold on to....except for Syd. When it came to her he felt nothing but hatred. He was stuck in lala land because of her. He did not remember why she had busted his skull open with a piece of re-bar...only that she had. He did not remember holding the butcher knife to her throat and threatening to cut her for tossing him out on his ass.

He remembered two people barging into the room....distracting him then caught flash of the re-bar coming at him. When he woke up in the hospital he was alone until a nurse came in. His memory all but wiped out though he could remember his name. A few minutes later a Doctor arrived.

“You have some brain damage, and your left eye.....it had to be removed.”

Ray cried...like a child.....

“You have multiple needle marks in your arm and blood tests show a large amount of heroin in your system.” The Doctor explained.

In a childish voice Ray replied. “I don’t know. My head hurts. I wanna go home. Mommy will be worried. I’m late. It’s dark outside. I should be home. I am supposed to be in when the street lights come on.”

The Doctor frowned then said. “It’s alright son.” Then he turned to the nurse and motioned for her to sedate the patient.

Echo parked the borrowed car as far away from the Nursing home entrance as possible. It was supper time. He knew Ray took his meals in his room. Quickly and moving about like he belonged there Echo went inside, hooked up with Ray then led him outside. Fortunately Ray was dressed in street clothes and not the gown he usually lazed around in.

“Where are we going Echo?”

“I saved your life once. Now you are coming to save mine.”

“Oh. Ok, but can I have an ice cream cone?”

“Sure kid. Just as soon as we get done with business.”

“Are we going to see Syd like you promised we would someday?”

“Something like that Ray. Something like that.”

“Good. I can brain her back just like she brained me.” Ray replied with an adult, sinister conviction.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The second encore was done. It was twenty past eleven. Mark climbed wearily from his drum kit and found his way back

stage. When he got there he found Inspector Bosend was waiting for him.

“Everyone must remain here.” The Inspector ordered. “I have information that Peter.....” He was interrupted before he could finish.

“I am here.” It was Echo. “And I have brought Ray with me.” He glanced at the inspector then at Mark. Then he fixed his eyes on Inspector Bosend. “It was my knife that killed Syd, but it was not me who stabbed her.”

“Really. And I suppose you know who did.” Bosend replied with a sceptical rasp.

“I have no idea who killed her but I know everyone thinks Ray’s disappearance two years ago meant he was dead and that I killed him.” Echo glared at the Inspector. “Well he is not dead and I didn’t kill anyone.”

“At least not this time round maybe.” The inspector replied cynically.

“Then who did kill her?” Mark Galbraith queried moodily.

“I have come to take Peter in. Maybe he didn’t kill Sydney Little but right now every piece of evidence points to him. I have no choice.”

“Mark.” Echo cried out pleadingly.

“Go with the Inspector Echo. I’ll do everything I can to help you. Don’t say anything. I will get you a lawyer.” Mark assured.

Echo nodded and went peacefully with Inspector Bosend.

Mark fixed his gaze on Ray, glaring with suspicion and anger.

“You were nothing but trouble back then and you are the same now.” He snarled.

“Mark wait. Ray has no idea what you are talking about. I doubt he even remembers you. The only reason he recognises me is because I visit him at the nursing home. He’s like a kid Mark. Syd did this to him...” Phil redirected Marks attention. Then he gave up the whole story about Ray’s vanishing act.

Ray smiled. “Echo promised me an ice cream cone.”

“Ok kid. We will find you one.....tomorrow. It’s too late tonight.” Phil responded. “I better get him back to the nursing home.” He added.

“No. Keep him here. Echo didn’t bring him here for nothing. Ray must know something. That’s why Echo risked getting arrested to come back.” Mark demanded then stared into Ray’s seemingly vacant eyes... and there, almost indiscernible he caught a glint that did not belong to a brain damaged 6 year old. Ok seven.

“Ok. I will take him home with me.” Phil offered.

“No. He is coming with me. I know someone who might get through to him.” Mark countered.

“Jeanette.” Phil guessed. “Sure. She has that way about her, but you better have an ice cream cone handy. He gets a little upset when he can’t get what he wants.” Phil warned.

Mark flipped his cell phone open and pressed HOME. When the call was answered he said. “Hi Hon. Get the ice cream out. I am bringing a guest home. You remember Syd’s Ray.”

CHAPTER NINE

Mark Galbraith helped Ray into Phil’s car. “Take him to the police in Wiarton. That’s where they are keeping Echo. Make damn sure he doesn’t wander off.” Mark instructed.

“Did Jeanette get anything out of him?” Phil inquired. “Just enough. I will tell you and the police all about it at the station. And Phil stop somewhere and get him an ice cream cone or he’ll drive you bonkers.”

Phil drove off. Mark went back into the cottage. “Thanks Hon. I knew there was more in that brain of Ray’s than a lot of ice cream.”

“He’s got more on the ball than he lets on. In fact it’s my guess he knows exactly what’s happening.” Jeanette replied.

“But you don’t think he could have come and killed Syd.” Mark interjected.

“Definitely not, but I’ll bet he knows who did.”

The phone rang. Mark answered.

“Help.” It was Ray.

Mark was out the door and racing down the road in his pickup in seconds. Phil had only been gone five minutes so he could not have gotten far and three clicks down the road he found Phil’s car in the ditch and Phil hanging out the driver’s door. Ray was nowhere to be seen.

Phil was barely conscious. Mark dialed 911.

“Phil. What the hell happened?”

“It was.....” Phil tried to talk but passed out before he could finish. It was then that Mark realized Phil had been shot in the shoulder. “Did Ray do this?” He tried to wake Phil but it was no good.

Just then a car pulled up. Mark saw Jeanette in the passenger side of her own car. Beside her in the driver’s seat was the last person in the world he expected to see. Ray. But they were not alone. Someone was in the back seat...brandishing a gun...someone wearing one of Mark’s own balaclavas.

“Get in the car and start driving. Turn right at the next road and don’t try anything or your honey her gets hurt.”

Mark did the only thing he could. He pulled Phil out of the driver's chair and left him on the road side. At least the emergency crew would find him. Then he got in the car and followed the kidnaper's instructions....to the letter.

The first road on the right was little more than a dirt cut through the trees with two signs. One read no winter maintenance and the other read Dead End. "How appropriate." Mark muttered. Then added, "Now what?" Just as his cellphone rang.

"Keep going to the end of the road and don't look back" The caller instructed. Mark checked the rear view mirror. The road ran straight back and there was no one behind him as far as he could see.

"Right. " Mark replied and jammed the breaks on. Then he spun the car around and jammed the gas pedal.

"Son of a..." He cursed but kept his eyes and concentration on the road. They couldn't have gotten too far but which way. Which way did they go.

Mark turned left and went back to find Phil but the ambulance and a cop had already arrived. He explained to the patrol officer what had happened then learning that no one had passed the cop Mark figured which direction the kidnaper had escaped. Without a word he was back in his truck, leaving Phil's car behind and racing after Jeanette and Ray. The speedometer wound up to 120.....130...

EPILOGUE

Inspector Bosend removed Echo's handcuffs and released him. Immediately he went to join Ray in another interview room where he found Mark and Jeanette as well. Mark had a cut over his left eye and Ray was favouring his left shoulder. Jeanette...luckily unscathed was dabbing Mark's cut with a cloth.

"Jeez. What happened? Why did the cops let me go? Bosend was getting ready to throw me in a cell." Echo spewed out a line of questions. No one answered right away.

Inspector Bosend entered the room a minute later. "You can all leave but we still have a few loose ends to tie up so don't go too far." He ordered.

"We are going on tour next week to Europe Inspector. Will you have it all worked out by then?" Mark asked.

"Sure. We just need statements from you. As soon as that is done you can go where ever you like."

"Can I have an ice cream cone now." Ray asked....a little frustrated. "Everyone laughed.

Oh yah....I guess you would like to know what happened. Silly me for forgetting to tell you...or maybe I'll just stop now.....ok....just kidding.

Mark ran Jeanette's car down but not getting to close to endanger his wife and Ray. Instead he kept his distance until the car had to slow down as it moved into town.

Suddenly the car turned into a grocery store parking lot and came to a stop. Jeanette bailed out the passenger door and ran. Ray tried to escape but the kidnaper grabbed him by the shirt collar and held him in the driver's seat with the muzzle of the gun pressed into his neck.

Mark slammed the breaks on and squealed to a halt only inches from the back of the car. With complete disregard he jumped out and charged in, not knowing Jeanette had escaped.

Before the kidnaper could fight back Mark reeled the back passenger door open and grabbed him by the throat and the gun hand, hauling him out of the car and slamming him to the ground. When the kidnapper lost his grip on the gun it flew up and hit Mark in the head just above the left eye, throwing him a little off balance, just enough for the kidnapper to start gaining his feet. But just at that moment Ray came up behind and slugged the masked creep over the back of the head with a tire iron, knocking him flat.

At that moment Jeanette joined in. She leaned down and ripped the balaclava off the kidnapper's head.

Mark and Jeanette stared in disbelief for several seconds then Mark, in a raw, angry voice asked. "Why? Why have

you done this. You....Us....We all have it made....We are making the big time.

“Because Syd found out I was ripping you guys off. I was taking money off the top to pay.....”

“What...Drugs....Gambling.....” Mark demanded in a tone just short of a rage.

“No. Nothing like that. It’s Blackmail.”

“It was you they were talking about in the songs for Blues In B Flat. The first song. A killer’s Heart.” Mark announced.

“Sam.” Ray whimpered.

Mark recited the words of the chorus of first song on the album.

“A long time ago in a run down back street hotel.

A place where only losers dwell.

There was man with a heart of ice.

Whose bloody hands took her life.”

“Who was black mailing you Sam?”

Sam shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. I just got notes every few weeks demanding more money. Syd saw one of the notes just before the show. I couldn’t let her tell you guys what.....”

“Shut up Sam.” Mark said in a hard voice. “Just shut up.”

THE END